

A keen searching glance flashed from the ferocious eye of the Kentuckian. It was but momentary. Quitting his firm grasp of the knife, he suffered his limbs to relax their tension, and aiming at carelessness, observed, with a smile, that was tenfold more hideous from its being forced :

"Well now, I guess, who would have expected to see two officers so far away from the fort at this early hour of the mornin'."

"Ah," said the taller of the two, availing himself of the first opening to a pun—(he was a sad punster)—which had been afforded—"We are merely out on a *shooting* excursion."

Desborough gazed doubtfully on the speaker—"Strange sort of a dress that for shootin', I guess—them cloaks must be a great tanglement in the bushes."

"They serve to keep our *arms* warm," continued Middlemore, perpetrating another of his execrables.

"To keep your arms warm! well sure-ly, if that arn't droil. It may be some use to keep the primms dry, I reckon; but I can't see the good of keepin' the fowlin' pieces warm. Have you met any game yet, officers. I expect as how I can pint you out a purty spry place for pattridges and sich like."

"Thank you, my good fellow; but we have appointed to meet our *game* here."

The dry manner in which this was observed had a visible effect on the settler. He glanced an eye of suspicion around, to see if others than the two officers were in view, and it was not without effort he assumed an air of unconcern, as he replied :

"Well, I expect I have been many a long year a hunter, as well as other things, and yet, dang me if I ever calculated the game would come to meet me. It always costs me a purty good chase in the woods."

"How the fellow *beats* about the *bush*, to find what *game* we are driving at," observed Middlemore, in an under tone, to his companion.

"Let the Yankee alone for that," exclaimed his friend—"I will match his cunning against your punning any day."

"The truth is, he is *fishing* to discover our motive for being here, and to find out if we are in any way connected with the disappearance of his rifles."

During this conversation *apart*, the Yankee had carelessly approached his canoe, and was affecting to make some arrangements in the disposition of the sail. The officers, the younger especially, keeping a sharp look out upon his movements, followed at some little distance, until they, at length, stood on the extreme verge of the sands. Their near approach seemed to render Desborough impatient :

"I expect, officers," he said, with a hastiness that, at any other moment, would have called immediate reproof, if not chastisement, "you will only be losin' time here for nothin'—about a mile beyond Hartley's, there'll be plenty of pattridges at this

hour, and I am jist goin' to start myself for a littl' shootin' in the Sandusky river."

"Then, I presume," said the younger officer, with a smile, "you are well provided with silver bullets, Desborough—for, in the hurry of departure, you seem likely to forget the only medium through which leaden ones can be made available : not a rifle or a shot-gun do I see."

The Yankee fixed his eye for a moment, with a penetrating expression, on the youth, as if he would have traced a meaning deeper than the words implied. His reading seemed to satisfy him that all was right.

"What," he observed, with a leer, half cunning half insolent, "if I have hid my rifle near the Sandusky swamp, the last time I hunted there."

"In that case," observed the laughing Middlemore, to whom the opportunity was irresistible, "you are going out on a *wild goose chase*, indeed. Your prospects of a good hunt, as you call it, cannot be said to be *sure as a gun*, for in regard to the latter, you may depend some one has discovered and *rifled* it before this."

"You seem to have laid in a store of provisions for this trip, Desborough," remarked the younger officer; "How long do you purpose being absent?"

"I guess three or four days," was the sullen reply.

"Three or four days! why your bag contains," and the officer partly raised a corner of the sail, "provisions for a week, or, at least, for *two* for half that period."

The manner in which the *two* was emphasised did not escape the attention of the settler. He was visibly disconcerted, nor was he at all reassured when the younger officer, whom we shall call Grantham, proceeded :

"By the bye, Desborough, we saw you leave the hut with a companion—what has become of him?"

The Yankee, who had now recovered his self-possession, met the question without the slightest show of hesitation :

"I expect you mean, young man," he said, with insufferable insolence, "a help as I had from Hartley's farm, to assist gittin' down the things. He took home along shore when I went back to the hut for the small bores."

"Oh ho, sir! the rifles are not then concealed near the Sandusky swamp, I find."

For once, the wily settler felt his cunning had over-reached itself. In the first fury of his subdued rage, he muttered something amounting to a desire that he could produce them at that moment, as he would well know where to lodge the bullets—but, recovering himself, he said aloud :

"The rale fact is, I've a long gun hid, as I said, near the swamps, but my small bore I always carry with me—only think, jist as I and Hartley's help left the hut, I pit my rifle against the outside